

EXHIBIT 13
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340

SUMMARY: You have the right to defend yourself, but do you have the ability? Greater training opportunities would be helpful. You have the right to defend yourself, but do you have the ability? Greater training opportunities would be helpful.

Montana's House of Representatives passed a bill the other day clarifying the right to use a gun for self-defense without necessarily shooting it.

House Bill 340 codifies common sense. That is, it makes clear that a lawful gun owner may brandish a weapon in a moment of danger in order to ward off a potential attacker. The bill also makes clear that failure to immediately retreat from danger doesn't negate anyone's right to self-defense.

This is the kind of legislation advocates of gun ownership promote in the face of the occasional oddball court verdict (mostly in other states) finding the victim or potential victim of crime guilty for use of a gun. It's also the kind of legislation that gun-control advocates tend to lampoon with suggestions that people will start waving guns around willy-nilly and creating havoc.

Self-defense is a fundamental human right. The right to bear arms is a right guaranteed by the U.S. and Montana constitutions. Plain logic dictates that if you have the right to shoot someone with a gun to protect yourself, you have the right to stop just short of that to protect yourself. HB340 may not be absolutely necessary, but it will provide a safeguard against wrong-headed prosecutors, opportunistic personal injury lawyers or bleeding-heart jurors from penalizing someone for legitimately protecting him- or herself.

Yet it's important to acknowledge that while brandishing a gun can thwart danger, it can also add to danger. Certainly, no one should ever pull a gun on someone without the expectation that it will quickly be used to shoot and kill. Pulling the trigger might not be necessary, but pulling the gun is an act of preparation for shooting, one that can at times provoke an adversary. It takes good judgment to know when pulling a gun will de-escalate a conflict and when it will escalate a conflict. Law enforcement officers get extensive training in order to make such judgments, and they don't always get it right.

Most people are legally entitled to own and use a weapon, but that doesn't mean they can do so competently. It's a lot harder than it looks on television, especially the judgment part.

People applying for concealed weapons permits must undergo some basic gun safety training. Hunters must also complete a simple course emphasizing safe gun handling that doesn't deal at all with self-defense. While we're all thinking about clarifying the right of self-defense, it's worth talking about what could be done to better prepare people to skillfully defend themselves.

In short, we could use more opportunities for training. Law enforcement agencies and firearm advocates, including the National Rifle Association, ought to recognize the benefits of providing gun owners with meaningful training opportunities. Indeed, even gun-control organizations and people who are mistrustful of an armed citizenry should appreciate the value of increasing the skill level of gun owners. The better trained people are in deciding when to brandish a gun, and the more proficient they are in using a gun, the safer this state would be - except perhaps for violent criminals.

Such training shouldn't be mandatory. You shouldn't have to take a class to exercise a fundamental right. But it ought to be readily available.

Missoula could get the ball rolling. We have an adult education program. We have law enforcement agencies. We have firearm advocates and organizations. We even have skilled private instructors who already provide training programs. Seems we have everything we need to promote advanced defensive training for gun owners. Offer specialized courses at reasonable cost and we'll bet they fill quickly.

Montana's already a fairly safe place to live, thanks in part to the general knowledge that behind most doors are armed citizens. Imagine how safe we'd be if Montanans had a reputation for being as well-trained as they are armed.